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AUTHOR Myers, Scott A.
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ABSTRACT

A study examined the communication climate of a graduate teaching assistant's (GTA) college classroom. Because the teaching role is often new to the GTA, establishing a communication climate may be a significant factor in classroom management. One section of a public speaking class taught by a new graduate teaching assistant at a large midwestern university was observed five times over a 2-month period. Results indicated that the GTA established a communication climate for his students that was open and supportive. Primarily, the climate was established through three factors: a highly-scripted daily routine; the interaction patterns that emerged among the students; and the general communication behaviors of the GTA. (Contains 17 references. Four diagrams illustrating the physical setting of the classroom, the seating chart, inside and outside clusters of students, and how the students grouped themselves for small-group activities are attached.) (Author/RS)

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Learning the Three C's:
Classroom Communication Climate

Scott A. Myers
School of Communication Studies
Kent State University
Kent, OH 44242-0001
(216) 672-2659
Bitnet: SMYERS@KENTVM

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Central States Communication Association,
Oklahoma City, OK, April 7-10, 1994

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Abstract

This paper examined the communication climate of a graduate teaching assistant's college classroom. Because the teaching role is often new to the GTA, establishing a communication climate may be a significant factor in classroom management. The author observed two sections of a public speaking class taught by a GTA at a large midwestern university. Each section was observed five times over a two-month period. The results of the observation of one of the classes is reported in this paper. It was concluded that the GTA established a communication climate for his students that was open and supportive. Primarily, this climate was established through three factors: a highly-scripted daily routine, the interaction patterns that emerged among the students, and the general communication behaviors of the GTA.

Learning the Three C's:
Classroom Communication Climate

"Speech teachers engage in a great deal of speech communication interaction with their students" (Hays, 1970, p. 43). As a result, one would hypothesize that the communication in the classroom would be open, supportive, and productive. After all, are not speech communication teachers supposed to know how to communicate? However, the key word is teacher because ultimately, the communication climate of a classroom is dependent upon the teacher.

Darling and Civikly (1988) stated that the communication climate of a classroom is determined by the needs of both the teacher and the student. For the teacher, a communication climate may be affected by the need to establish control, credibility, and/or esteem. For the student, a communication climate may be affected by the need to establish and defend personal worth and social stability in the eyes of both teacher and peers. Thus, these dichotomous needs will impact the communication climate of any classroom.

This is just one reason why it is important to look at the communication climate of the college classroom. If teachers and students have different needs that affect the establishment of a communication climate, it is possible that this need attainment may influence the affective and cognitive domains of student learning.

This paper will examine the communication climate of a graduate teaching assistant's (GTA) college classroom. Because the teaching role is often new to the GTA, establishing a communication climate may be a significant factor in classroom management. Looking at how a GTA establishes a classroom communication climate will provide much-needed information not only on climate formation, but how the GTA adapts to his or her new role.

One way to examine the communication climate of a classroom is by adopting a symbolic interactionist framework. Symbolic interactionism is based on the idea that meaning is generated through interactions with others (Blumer, 1969). Interaction is established through how a person understands the self, understands others, and how others understand the person (Dillon, 1989). This study will look at how a GTA establishes a communication climate based on these interactions. The classroom is an ideal location because "members of any group that occupies a particular position in the social structure develop common mental frameworks and patterns of behavior for dealing with the situations they encounter" (Jacob, 1987, p. 33).

Review of Relevant Literature

What is communication climate? According to Rosenfeld (1983), communication climate is established through the social and psychological contexts of any relationship. The literature on communication climate suggests that climate may be dependent on two factors: (a) the use of supportive and defensive behaviors

and (b) the use of confirming and disconfirming responses. Taken together, these factors create patterns of classroom behavior that may or may not establish a supportive climate. In addition, other factors have been found to influence climate.

Supportive/defensive behaviors. A supportive communication climate is efficient and is characterized as consisting of few distortions, effective listening behaviors, and clear message transmission (Darling & Civikly, 1988). A defensive climate, on the other hand, "interferes with communication and thus makes it difficult--and sometimes impossible--for anyone to convey ideas clearly and to move effectively toward the solution of . . . problems" (Gibb, 1961, p. 148).

Gibb (1961) developed six categories of behaviors which he believed were characteristic of supportive and defensive behaviors in small groups. Originally developed as small group behaviors, these categories are applicable in the classroom as well. Gibb labeled these behaviors as description-evaluation, problem orientation-control, spontaneity-strategy, empathy-neutrality, equality-superiority, and provisionalism-certainty. A supportive communication climate is characterized by the first behavior in each group while use of the second behavior reflects a defensive climate. A supportive communication climate reduces defensiveness and allows students to concentrate fully upon the content and structure of the message (Gibb, 1961).

Rosenfeld (1983) found that the communication climate of a college classroom may be characterized by an underlying level of

defensiveness. His study examined how liked and disliked classes are distinguished by their levels of supportiveness and defensiveness. Specifically, he found: (a) supportiveness is more important than defensiveness in assessing climate, (b) liked classes generally have more supportive than defensive behaviors, (c) liked classes may be characterized by teacher behaviors that are classified as supportive and (d) disliked classes cause students to develop coping mechanisms (i.e., forming alliances against the teacher, not doing what the teacher asks). Moreover, Rosenfeld and Jarrard (1985) discovered in liked classes, students perceive themselves as important and valued and work toward establishing a "coworker" relationship with the professor.

Confirming/disconfirming responses. Sieburg (1969, cited in Trenholm & Jensen, 1988) stated that the use of confirming and disconfirming behaviors affect the values individuals place on the self and on others. A confirming response expresses a caring attitude (Rosenfeld, 1983) and implies that the other individual is a valuable person (Rosenfeld & Jarrard, 1985). A disconfirming message fails to acknowledge the other person as being a vital part of the communication process and is expressed in an uncaring manner (Rosenfeld, 1983).

Additional factors. Researchers have identified three other variables that affect the communication climate of a classroom: (a) sex of the students, (b) class enrollment, and (c) interest in the subject matter. It has been established that female students do not participate as much as male students in the

college classroom (Crawford & MacLeod, 1990; Hall & Sandler, 1982; Pearson & West, 1991). Female students often ask fewer questions in class and are less assertive than males in doing so (Pearson & West, 1991).

Class participation has also been found to be a factor. Constantinople, Cornelius, and Gray (1988) and Crawford and MacLeod (1990) determined that a smaller number of students enrolled in a class results in increased class participation. However, Karp and Yoels (1976) argued that most students opt for non-involvement in the classroom; therefore, student participation becomes dependent upon the organizational features of the classroom (i.e., a lack of student responsibility, the structure of assignments and syllabi) and is not indicative of the communication climate.

DeYoung (1977) proposed that a higher level of interest in the classroom content (as indicated through attendance records) is a reflection of a more positive climate. In addition, Heller, Puff, and Mills (1985) found that time may be the prevailing factor in classroom participation. Over time, students are asked to lead more discussion, are given more time to answer questions, are called more often by name, and are recognized more when volunteering in class. Thus, the year (i.e., freshman, sophomore) of the student may be a determinant of climate as well.

Consequently, it appears that multiple factors influence the formation of classroom communication climate.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the communication climate of a GTA's classroom. In this study, communication climate was operationally defined as "the verbal and nonverbal behaviors used by the GTA that established the communicative tone for the students in the classroom." The verbal and nonverbal behaviors of the students enrolled in the classroom were also studied.

The research questions which guided the data collection were:

RQ1: How does a GTA establish communication climate in the classroom?

RQ2: To what extent does communication climate depend on the students?

Method

Over the course of a two-month period, I observed two sections of a public speaking class taught by a graduate teaching assistant in the speech communication department at a large midwestern university. Each section was observed five times over the two-month period.

Selection of GTA. The GTA, who will be referred to as TAB in this study, was one of 10 new GTAs in the communication department in the fall semester of 1992. TAB was selected because he had no reservations about participating in this project. He was informed that (a) his classes would be observed at randomly-selected times throughout the semester, (b) his

participation would remain anonymous during the course of the project, and (c) the purpose of the observation was for a project that would examine a GTA's teaching style.

Description of GTA. TAB is a Caucasian, middle-class 26-year-old male who grew up in a suburb of a major Midwestern city. He attended college at a large state institution where he received his B.A. degree in secondary education. After graduation, he attended graduate school at the same institution and earned a M.A. degree in rhetoric. While attending graduate school, TAB had a graduate teaching assistantship and taught a stand-alone public speaking class for two years. Currently, he is enrolled in a doctoral program in rhetorical studies and is a teaching fellow. This is his third year of teaching. After graduation in 1996, TAB plans on becoming a college professor.

Description of the course. The class TAB teaches is a public speaking course rooted in rhetorical theory. This course is a general education requirement, which means that for most students, this course is a graduation requirement. There are approximately 35 sections of this course offered each semester.

TAB taught a similar class at his previous institution, so no major adjustments in teaching style or course material were made by the instructor. He teaches two sections of this course, both of which meet three times a week and are fifty-minutes in length. Section 100, which meets from 7:45 a.m. until 8:35 a.m., was selected for this study. This class is composed of 21

students, which includes 16 freshman. Twelve students are female and nine students are male.

Description of classroom. This class was taught in a classroom on the third floor of the speech communication building. The room is approximately 30' by 20' and is quite cavernous (Field Notes--10/2). The room, which previously housed a mass communication laboratory, is windowless, has 15' ceilings, and is accessible through one door. Six rows of desks line the room, with eight to ten desks per row. The teacher's desk is centered in the front of the rows, with a moveable chalkboard located to the right. TAB compared the classroom to a courtroom without the benches (Interview Transcription--11/19). There are no pictures or any personal artifacts of any kind in the room. Against the back wall sit a round table and a student desk.

Researcher role. During this study, I assumed a participant-observer role, which supported the use of the symbolic interactionist framework. I would walk to class with TAB, sit in the back of the room, and take notes on what I observed. In no way did I interact with the students or with TAB. My presence in the classroom was neither explained nor justified, and TAB proceeded to conduct class without any reference to my presence. Although students periodically would notice me or look at me, none of the 21 students attempted to talk or interact with me in any way. I stayed until the end of the class and walked TAB back to his office.

Data collection and analysis. During class, I would take notes on what TAB was doing. I recorded everything he did and noted the actions and behaviors of his students. After each class period, I would then transcribe my notes in a notebook and would look for (a) communication behaviors exhibited by TAB and (b) patterns of classroom behavior. I also kept a separate notebook on the students and assigned them code names. In addition, I kept sketches on the physical layout of the classroom and noted where the students sat as well as how TAB moved around the classroom. Appendix A contains a sketch of the classroom.

Throughout the two-month time period, TAB and I would casually interact about both his classes. After each discussion, I would write what TAB had said into my notebook. However, because TAB and I spoke quite frequently about his classes outside of the general office area, not everything he relayed to me was written down immediately.

At the end of the two-months, I conducted an audiotaped interview with TAB in which I asked him a variety of questions about his Section 100 class. After the tape was transcribed, TAB was asked to read the transcript to attest to its clarity.

It should be noted that I did not interview the students in the classroom nor did I attempt to interact with the students in any manner. This study examines the establishment of a communication climate as seen through the eyes of its teacher.

Results and Discussion

In this study, it can be concluded that the GTA established a communication climate for his students that was open and supportive. Primarily, this climate was established through three factors: (a) a highly-scripted daily routine, (b) the interaction patterns that emerged among the students, and (c) the general communication behaviors of the GTA.

The daily routine. A typical day began with TAB entering the classroom a few minutes before class started. Usually, he gave the class some instructions, such as to turn in exams or to get ready for speeches. Although class had not officially started, three-fourths of the students were present. Appendix B charts where the students sat. Before class began, TAB might converse with a few of his students. He stated:

> If I walk in and it's really dead in there, usually I'll make some sort of a comment as I walk in to try to sorta get them to liven up a bit. Or to get some sort of reaction out of them. If they're talking, I'll be quiet and I'll let them talk. I think that's important that they feel some bond with the other people in there. (Interview Transcription--11/19)

At 7:45 a.m., TAB shut the door, which signified that class had begun.

The class started when a student would ask a question. At this point, TAB stood in the front center of the room and received questions from this vantage point. Although the questions were always about an assignment and were therefore applicable to everyone, TAB directed the answer to whoever asked the question by looking directly at the person and giving the

reply. During this question and answer session, the rest of the class was preoccupied in other activities such as reading, talking with a neighbor, working on another assignment, or listening to TAB.

A few minutes later, after all questions had been answered, TAB would start covering the material. Because the room offered limited chalkboard space, the students write everything down quickly and keep pace with TAB. TAB noted:

> the chalkboard is so small you can't put anything on it without erasing it every few minutes, which means I must literally stop and ask them if they have the information before I get ready to move on . . . you can keep moving along until you've reached the end [of the board] and by that time they should have the stuff written down in their notes. (Interview Transcription--11/19)

Over the next twenty minutes, several students arrived late. It appears as if one-fourth of the class was late on each occasion that I observed. Five students were late on three of the five days, and three students were late the other two. TAB does not say anything to them nor does he stop lecturing. He said this is due primarily to the fact that when he is teaching, nothing distracts him (Informal Conversation--10/25). The students slipped into the room and took their places. One particular student, AMBER, is habitually late. Of the five class meetings that I observed, AMBER walked in late four times. For two of the classes, she brought nothing to class but her keys. Because she is late, AMBER has to get the information from her classmates. Her classmates always gave her the information

without hesitation. Other students, such as COLLIE, GARTH, SMART BOY, ATHLETE, and DUMDUM walk in late as well.

The class met until 8:35 a.m., and during this fifty-minute time frame, the student activity varied. TAB stated that while he is lecturing, he is not always aware of what is going on in the classroom.

> Scott: When you are up there [front of the room] teaching, what are you thinking about?
>
> TAB: Trying to get the material out as easily in a manner that's as easy for them to bring up later.
>
> Scott: And are you aware of what goes on around you?
>
> TAB: Sometimes. I know there are people dozing off. I'm the type of person that does not like creating conflict in class. And at 7:45 a.m. the sleeping thing, they're tired. That is a fact that doesn't really bother me a whole lot.

Other student actions, such as doing homework for another class or talking to their friends, were not even mentioned. A daily routine might occur like this.

> We were locked out of the regular classroom so we had to go across the hall. I noticed that students sat in the same positions as in the other classroom. Fifteen people were present at 7:45 a.m. ATHLETE walks in late. Her group doesn't say anything to her. TAB says "let's get started. Start with complete groups." Everybody is still talking. Group 1 gets up. Class still talking. Group 1 gets organized and begins. AMBER walks in late at 7:57 a.m. AMBER and girl in group speak while the group works. Group 1 finishes, group 2 gets ready. Class members are speaking to each other. Groups go right after one another. After group 4, TAB starts the lecture. Relates it to the previous lecture. GARTH sleeps on and off. When TAB walks to the board, everyone gets their notebooks out. TAB stays on the left side of the room. Doesn't even venture from his usual place. Class is quiet, they watch TAB, write down notes, and don't say anything. GARTH sleeps again. TAB always focuses on the right side of the room. AMBER is working on something else. GARTH pulls out homework from another class. AMBER drops her key. TAB doesn't notice. BROWNBRAIN asks a question. TAB looks directly at her while

> answering. A couple of people stretch their arms. TAB hits head on string hanging from screen. Doesn't appear to notice. ACCENT is studying something else. PURPLE and BROWNBRAIN ask questions. People talk while TAB is answering. (Field Notes--11/9)

During some class periods, the class engaged in an activity. Of the five days I observed, three of the days involved an activity that required the formation of groups. Each time there was a group activity, the same groups formed. Primarily, there were four or five people in each group (depending on the attendance that day) that contained the same people. During group work, TAB tried to spend equal time with each group as he walked around the room. However, for the most part, TAB spent his time with two of the groups, a fact he notices but justifies because of the groups' physical location.

> Then usually of course, those two groups tend to be toward the front of the room and so usually, even in my other class, I always end up in front of the room . . . its sorta like being the high school teacher and having to keep an eye on everyone. (Interview Transcription--11/19)

After the group activity was completed, TAB gave some final instructions, directions, or comments. Sometimes the activity culminated in a performance in front of the class. At this point, the attendance sheet is circulated. It is not uncommon for the class to lose interest in what TAB is saying and concentrate on getting the attendance sheet. When the agenda was completed, TAB dismissed the class. The class was let out early on four of the five occasions that I was present.

During class, students did not always listen. At various points, TAB told the class to pay attention, but they were not always obligatory in their responses. For example,

> Speeches start. TAB tells class to get ready. After BROWNBRAIN's speech, three people walk in late and class talks in between points. TAB tries to get class to quiet down. He says "OK" and laughs, then someone says "shhh." During second speech class pays attention and SOX walks in late. After speech, class quietly talks and TAB says "the less you talk, the quicker we're out of here." After third speech, class is quiet but talking gets progressively louder. TAB says "OK, what is all this talking?" Fourth speech begins and ends and there is minimal talking, primarily among BROWNBRAIN, SMART GIRL, and SMART BOY. TAB asks class for their opinions. People talk during his questions. Some students keep talking the entire time. (Field Notes--10/21)

As the class shuffled out the door, a few students lingered to talk to TAB. Some students stayed in the class in order to chat with one another. On two occasions, BROWNBRAIN's boyfriend came into the classroom and met her. On the way out the door, TAB walks back to his office.

In this class, the routine was fairly predictable. As a result, I believe that the highly-scripted actions of the GTA led the students to behave in a manner appropriate to TAB's actions.

The cluster and the groups. One way to understand the communication climate in this class is to look at the behaviors of the students. Since this class is composed primarily of freshmen, one might expect them to be quiet and reserved based on their inexperience as college students (Heller et al., 1985; Karp & Yoels, 1976). Yet, this class is unique in how the participants bond with each other.

Overall, the class formed two clusters, although the clusters break down even more when they are engaged in a group activity. Two clusters emerge: the inside cluster and the outside cluster. Both clusters believe that they are different from the other cluster. The inside cluster TAB labels as the 'smart cluster, the competitive cluster.'

> Scott: On the whole, do you think they like everyone? Are they supportive of everyone?
>
> TAB: Very competitive. Not everyone.
>
> Scott: Who is competitive?
>
> TAB: The smart cluster. The PURPLE cluster. That whole middle section except for the back part where C, D, E, F sit. But for the most part, you take the two forward to the front. Cut off H and I.
>
> Scott: How does that affect the class, you think?
>
> TAB: The people who are the most competitive, I've noticed, like each other. I guess you pretty much say that it is the peripheral part whose not, which is really weird. If you work yourself in a square, the people who sit around the square are not very competitive. They don't like the other people, the inner people. But they like the people around the edges, like the other people around the perimeter. The people in the middle [inside cluster] like the people in the middle. (Interview Transcription--11/19)

Appendix C illustrates the two clusters.

It is also the inside cluster that directed the focus of the class. During the first few minutes of the class when questions are asked, the questions are most often asked by three students: BROWNBRAIN, ACCENT, and PURPLE. These three students are female, freshmen, and compose the nucleus of the inside cluster. According to TAB, these women "set the tone for the class" (Informal Conversation--10/21). Of the 25 questions asked on the

days I observed, 16 were from these three students. The questions were always task-oriented. TAB has stated that he can predict what questions will be asked from these three, even before the question is asked (Informal Conversation--10/18).

The clusters are also protective of their members. What one person does is supported by the other cluster members. TAB recalled an instance in which an inside cluster member orally critiqued the speech of an outside cluster member.

> She attacked him verbally, tore the speech to shreds. Everyone in the perimeter was in shock that had happened. And some people went to him afterwards and told him they couldn't believe that she would do something like this. The other people who were inside the cluster who did the attacking said she was right. (Interview Transcription--11/19)

Not only do members of the two clusters work with each other, but as they participate in group activities, the groups generally stay the same. The inside cluster breaks into two smaller groups, one of which works with other people in the outside cluster. A total of four groups end up forming in TAB's class. TAB stated that the groups formed on their own volition (Field Notes--10/16) and group membership has remained consistent throughout the semester (Interview--11/19). Appendix D shows these groups. Occasionally, a student or two end up sitting alone because they missed the previous class where instructions had been given or work had been done.

The groups generally work on their own and regulate the behavior of their group members. The group is expected to work

as one entity and TAB does not interfere with the proceedings. TAB commented:

> Within the groups they pretty much like one another. I know there are some conflicts within the groups and they deal with these in their own little way, I've noticed. They have a way of getting back at them if something goes wrong, which is something. They will protect them too. It depends on the situation. (Interview Transcription--11/19)

One such situation was when one group worked on an activity that was to be presented orally to the class at the next meeting. As the groups got into their formations during the next class meeting, ATHLETE was missing and the group proceeded without her. She showed up thirty seconds before the presentation. She asked TAB if she could do her speech, and he said "ask your group." The group did not allow her to do her part (Field Notes--10/16).

Still, regardless of the cluster or the group, the class as a whole supported each other when it came to public speaking. On the day that speeches were presented, applause followed each speaker's presentation. The oral critiques that followed were just as favorable (Field Notes--10/2).

Thus, the students appeared open and supportive of one another. Although an occasional problem arose, it did not interfere with the overall classroom proceedings or the students' participation.

Teacher behaviors. For the most part, TAB's behaviors were not anything out of the ordinary. However, some of his behavior toward students is determined by how well he liked or enjoyed the particular student.

> Scott: So you treat all of them equally?
>
> TAB: Well, I don't think . . . there's one sense to be equal. A sense that you treat everyone equitable and when it comes to things like grading. That's how you use the word equal here.
>
> Scott: Let me rephrase it then. You're willing to communicate with each one on the same level. But do you?
>
> TAB: I would say no, as much as I would like to and try to. It goes back to what I said earlier. I do try to make the effort to get to know them a little bit, but some of them sort of try to make it a little bit more of a push. If it comes back to do I like some of them better than the others, yes I do. (Interview Transcription--11/19)

In particular, TAB cited CAVS as not only being his favorite student, but being the one he likes the most. CAVS and TAB have a comraderie that is different from the others in the classroom. For example, TAB told of the time he threw a marshmallow at CAVS. Although the class was bewildered, it was seen as an acceptable behavior (Field Notes--11/20). TAB also mentioned that PURPLE is the smartest and AMBER is not the brightest, but stated that he does not treat them any differently from the rest of the students and that the class is aware of this.

> I think they know that I like CAVS because I'll go and make the jokes about the FLASHES and he'll make some sort of comment back. They don't know that AMBER is getting the worst grade in the class. They know that PURPLE is . . . they go to her, have her look at their outlines because they know she gets As on them. (Interview Transcription--11/19)

On the surface, TAB's interactions with his students would have to be judged as being fair and impartial. None of his actions suggests he chooses one student over the other or plays favorites. His behaviors also suggest he knows his students as well. When TAB passed back assignments, he did not have to ask a

student for his or her name or if someone was present (Field Notes--10/5). He was able to give each person the correct paper. However, when he talked with the students in class, he never addressed them by name.

> Scott: For the most part, you point, you don't use their names when you talk with them. Why is that, and are you aware that you do that?
>
> TAB: Yes, I'm aware I do that. A lot of it has to do with the train of thought and also I have to shift gears and part of the shifting gears somewhat gets lost and usually it's the name part that gets lost . . . it's just the mental shift that I've got to make all of a sudden that I'm more concerned with what their question is and keeping things on track. (Interview Transcription--11/19)

Other than not addressing students by name, TAB believed that he establishes a supportive climate for his students. He said he is willing to defend his students in class, and above all else, is approachable. Even though he has high expectations, TAB stated that he is available to help them at any point. One such way is by providing his students with his home phone number and by meeting with them at various times outside class and office hours.

Conclusion

Based on my observations, my informal conversations, and my interview with TAB, I would conclude that TAB established a supportive climate in his classroom based on not what he <u>does</u>, but rather what he <u>does not</u> do. He does not impose sanctions upon behaviors that other teachers might (i.e., sleeping in class, talking) nor does he interfere with the students as they engage in their activities. He also does not appear to inundate

them with a list of rules. Furthermore, when it comes to assignments, his students appear knowledgeable about his expectations and turn their work in on time.

In keeping with the literature, I did not find that TAB specifically used any supportive or defensive behaviors (Gibb, 1961) but that for the most part, his communication with the class was efficient, free of distortion, and had clear transmission (Darling & Civikly, 1988; Gibb, 1961). Students utilized these behaviors as well. Defensiveness, even during speech critiques, was kept to a minimal if nonexistent level. Although the use of confirming and disconfirming behaviors was not actively tabulated, I would state that the use of disconfirming responses was moderate, thus encouraging the students to feel valued (Sieburg, 1969, in Trenholm & Jensen, 1988; Rosenfeld & Jarrard, 1983).

Rather, the composition of the class appeared to be a major factor in composing the communication climate of this classroom. Dynamics are an essential element. In an analysis of supportive-defensive behaviors, Hays (1970) concluded that "the classroom communication climate is determined by the students' perceptions" (p. 48). Although the clusters divided the class when it came to group activity, the students rallied around one another. An examination of the additional factors that influence classroom climate (i.e., sex, enrollment, interest) illustrates that the students in this class did not conform to previous research findings. The majority of the questions were asked by females

who were also freshman, thus not supporting previous research (Heller et al., 1985; Pearson & West, 1991). It could be argued that participation is low, primarily dependent on the three women that TAB identified as guiding the class (Karp & Yoels, 1976) and that classroom enrollment does not really affect participation (Constantinople et al., 1988; Crawford & MacLeod, 1990).

Clearly, classroom communication climate is more than just a "social/psychological context within which relationships occur" (Rosenfeld, 1983, p. 157). It is composed of the teacher-student interaction as reflected in the daily routine, the interaction among the students, and the behaviors of the teacher. Taken together, these factors set the tone for the classroom. The argument could be made that the atmosphere is too open due to all the student activity that is going on. However, in this case, it appears to work. In this paper, the purpose was to capture the reality of communication climate in a particular instance. The findings may help illustrate the notion of climate in a broader sense, but in no way do these findings advocate that a classroom climate is established in <u>one</u> particular way for <u>all</u> teachers across <u>all</u> disciplines.

Limitations

If I were to conduct a similar study, I would do a number of things differently. First, I would increase my number of classroom visits and definitely attend the first day. The first day of class sets the precedent for the rest of the semester (Friedrich & Cooper, 1990). TAB alluded to his level of

expectations a few times, which he addressed on the first day (Interview Notes--11/20), but there was no way to corroborate his claims with the actions of the students. Second, I would interview the students. Perhaps I should have interviewed a student from each of the clusters as well as each of the groups in order to see if their perceptions matched up with TAB's. Third, I would spend more time interviewing the teacher, although much information was gleaned from the many informal conversations.

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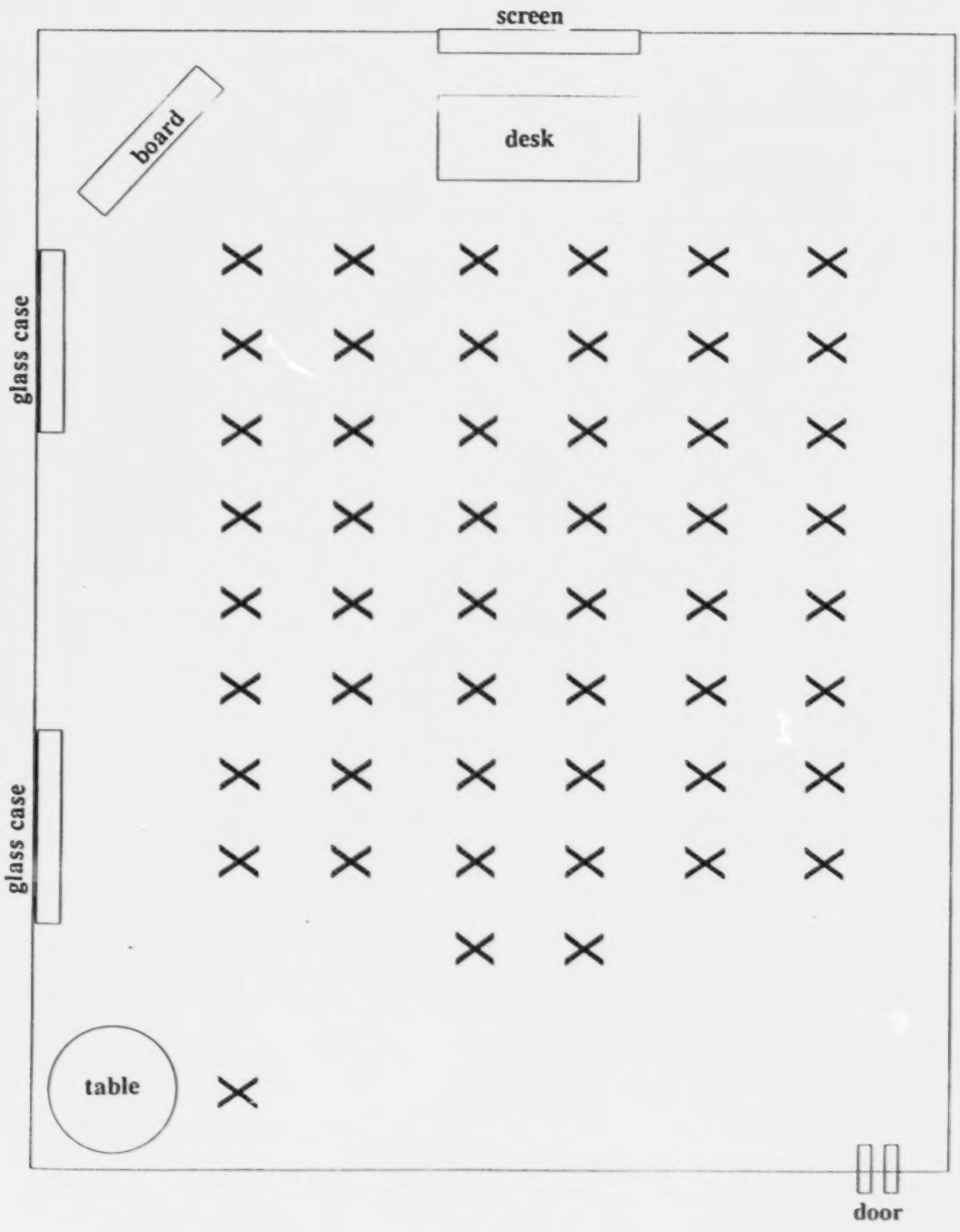
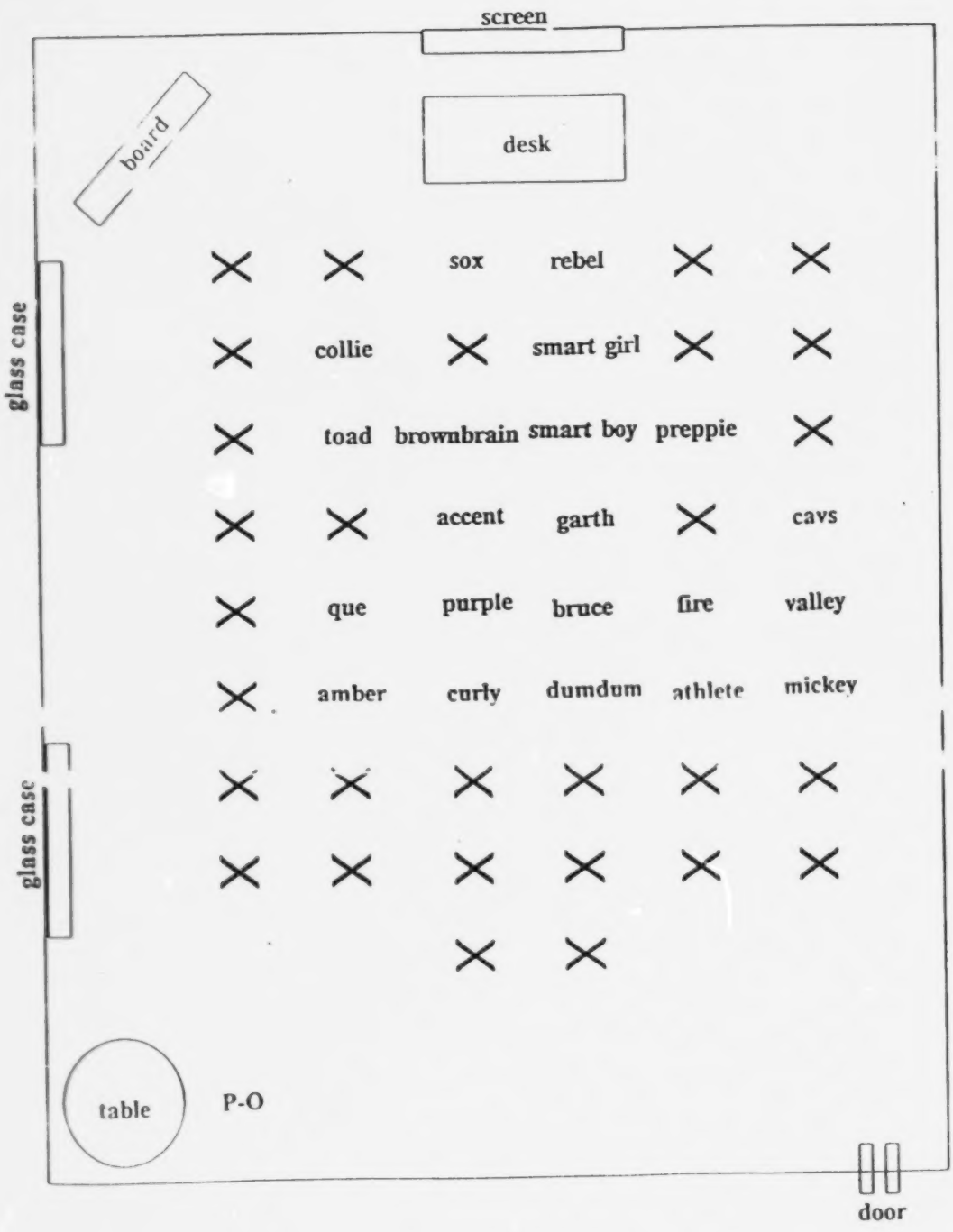
Appendix A:

Physical setting of the classroom



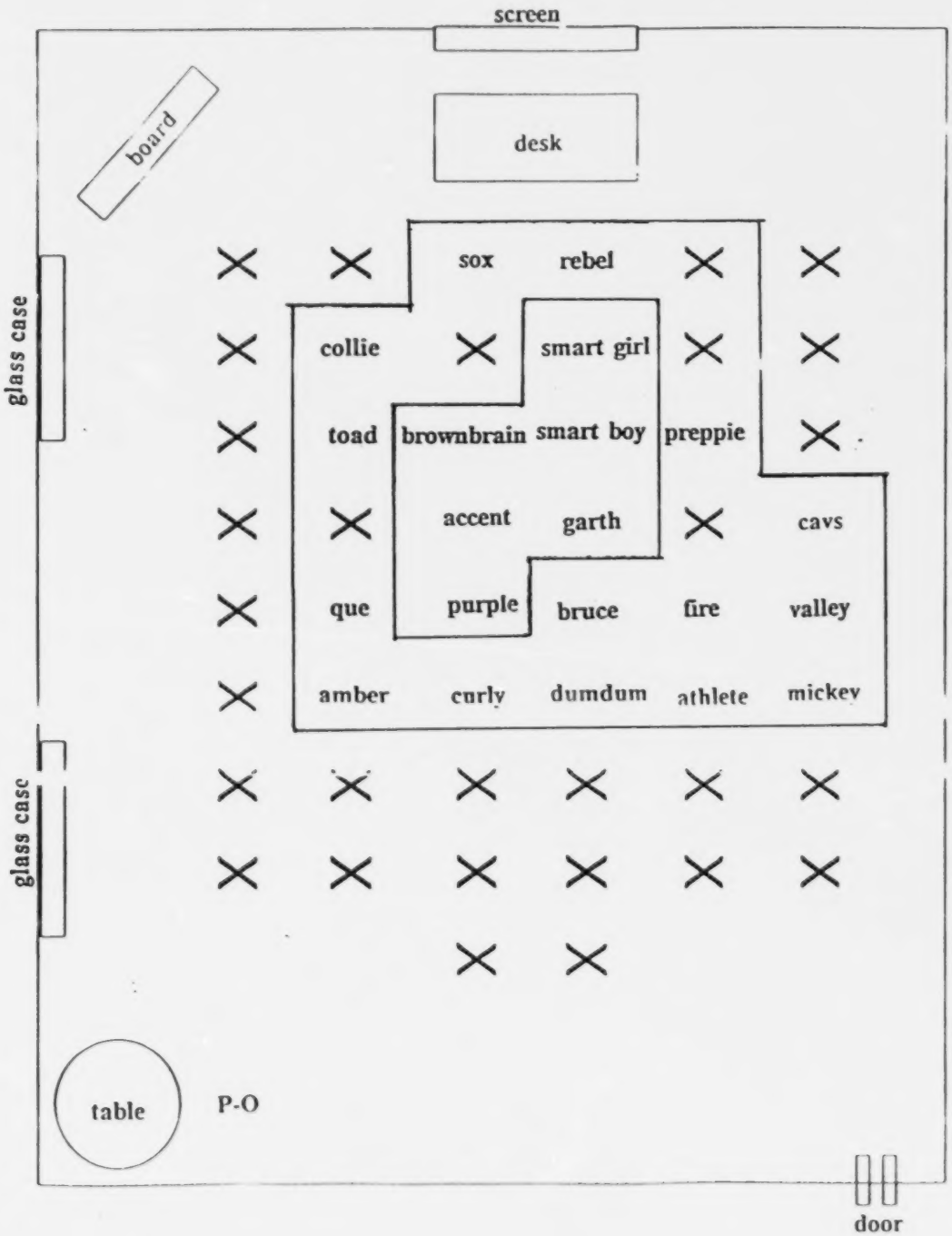
Appendix B:

Seating chart



Appendix C:

Inside and outside clusters



Appendix D:

Groups